

Committee on Specific Commitments

Status

The Committee on Specific Commitments examines ways to improve the technical accuracy of scheduling commitments, primarily in preparation for the coming round of GATS negotiations, and oversees application of the procedures for the modification of schedules under Article XXI of the GATS. The Committee also oversees implementation of commitments in country schedules in sectors for which there is no sectoral body, currently all sectors except financial services.

Assessment of the First Five Years of Operation

The Committee has taken on four technical, complicated, resource-intensive tasks and has produced results that improve prospects for clear, commercially-valuable commitments in the coming negotiations (in the case of work on nomenclature and on scheduling guidelines), usefully elaborate on GATS provisions (in the case of Article XXI procedures), and promote accessibility and clarity in GATS schedules in the case of the electronic schedules.

Major Issues in 1999

Much of the Committee's work in 1999 was in support of the new negotiations. First, the Committee continued its work on developing an agreed classification system for use in scheduling sectoral commitments, using as a resource technical issues raised in the Council's sectoral "information exchange." Led by Member submissions, the Committee has been examining proposed changes in nomenclature for environmental services, energy services, express delivery services, legal services, and construction services. Second, the Committee began to examine proposed revisions to scheduling guidelines that were developed by the GATT Secretariat for use in scheduling country commitments during the Uruguay Round. Members agreed that revision of these guidelines can help improve transparency and consistency of new commitments.

Also in 1999, the Committee reached agreement on procedures for modification of schedules under GATS Article XXI. The Council subsequently adopted the agreed procedures, pursuant to GATS Article XXI:5. Finally, the Committee directed the Secretariat to continue work on an electronic "looseleaf" version of each Member's GATS schedule, incorporating, for example, the results of the financial services and basic telecommunications negotiations in single, consolidated country schedules. This version would primarily be for ease of reference and would not have legal status in the WTO; it would be made available to the public in CD-ROM format. Members received drafts of their respective schedules in December and will provide comments by March 2000.

Work for 2000

The Committee's work will continue to play an important role in the first phase of the GATS round. The United States and other countries will propose nomenclature changes in additional sectors, and Members will work to conclude discussions on the five sectors now under discussion. These new sectoral definitions then would be available for use in the GATS round. Members also recognize the importance of completing any revisions to the scheduling guidelines early in the round.

Depending on comments on the draft version of Members' schedules, the Committee may be able to direct the Secretariat to prepare a final version of the electronic "looseleaf" schedules in the first half of 2000.